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Local

Record Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests found this year

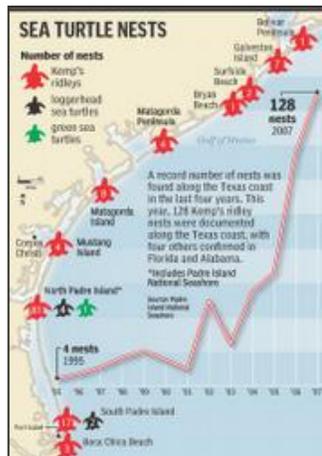
By Jaime Powell (Contact)
Monday, September 3, 2007

Photo Gallery

Kemp's ridley nests



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CORPUS CHRISTI Of the record 128 Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests found this year on Texas beaches, 81 were found on North Padre Island and four on Mustang Island, making local beaches the hottest nesting spot in the United States for the endangered turtles.

"We are very encouraged to have four consecutive record years for nesting," said Donna Shaver, chief of the division of sea turtle science and recovery at Padre Island National Seashore. "These are records in comparison during the course of our conservation activities that date back to 1978."

The nesting season for the Kemp's ridley, the most endangered sea turtle, runs from April through mid-July. During that time, National Park Service staff and volunteers patrol daily looking for turtles and nests, logging a total of 73,632 miles and 8,895 hours this year.

The only hint mother Kemp's ridley sea turtles leave for the turtle spotters is a faint, 2-foot wide trail in the sand. Patrolling is hit and miss. Some volunteers have gone years without finding anything, Shaver said, while others find nests during some of their first patrols.

"It's very difficult work because they nest during the day and tracks blow away quickly," Shaver said. "They don't leave much of a trail because they are the lightest and the smallest of the sea turtles, and they tend to nest on windy days. It's a combination of both skill and luck and being at the right place at the right time."

Of the 10,594 Kemp's ridleys hatchlings released along the Texas coast this year, 8,897 baby turtles were hatched locally and released into the Gulf of Mexico.

Shaver credits the nesting increase to years of protection efforts that began in 1966 in Mexico, the turtles' primary nesting destination, and spread to the U.S. in 1978.

The sea turtles were decimated by a combination of factors, including environmental problems, natural predators, shrimpers' nets and a Mexican population that makes cowboy boots out of their skin, eats turtle flesh and values the eggs for food and their supposed aphrodisiac qualities, according to conservation agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the United States Humane Society.

When Shaver first started turtle patrols at the National Seashore in 1986,

Featured Restaurants

there were about 10 volunteers. Not many nests were being found -- maybe one every three years, Shaver said.

"It looked very different for the species," Shaver said. "Many people thought it might already be too late."

However, as results of those early conservation efforts were realized about a decade later, nesting increased and funding followed. Awareness also has increased, helped by education efforts including public releases of the hatchlings. This year, the National Seashore had 13 public releases, which attracted more than 2,000 visitors.

"The whole profile has been raised and community involvement has been raised and that's exciting to see, too," Shaver said.

With increased awareness has come an increase in volunteers.

This year, Shaver had 119 volunteers, 105 of whom aided with patrols.

Linda Morehead, who started as a volunteer turtle spotter nine years ago and ended up as a paid National Park Service turtle spotter, estimated she has logged 60,000 miles of beach.

"There is lots of solitude," she said. "You drive many, many miles and you find some turtles. For an outdoors person it is perfect."

Shaver said there still is progress to be made protecting the species, but she is encouraged by the numbers.

"I'm just so happy about the increasing numbers that we've been documenting in the last few years and it gives us great hope that these increases are going to continue in the future and that we are on our way to helping preserve the species."

Contact Jaime Powell at 886-3716 or powellj@caller.com

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Posted by [rabbit78418](#) on September 3, 2007 at 6 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Good work.

Posted by [daveruhlin](#) on September 3, 2007 at 9:12 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Very cool!

Posted by [slambmd](#) on September 3, 2007 at 9:59 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

That is a great story. I am very glad to see everyone's efforts rewarded. Hats off to Texas with both their turtle and whooping crane programs.

Posted by [mr.n0_it_all](#) on September 3, 2007 at 11:44 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Turtle

Posted by [mondosurf77](#) on September 3, 2007 at 1:31 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

If you enjoy seeing these sea turtles, you should give a big thank you to Mr. Johnny French. He prevented the city from bulldozing all the seaweed this year before they took the necessary steps to ensure the sea turtle nests would not be harmed. He got so much backlash from many in the city, yet this is what he was fighting for. Here is the Caller Story :

<http://www.caller.com/news/2007/jul/02/s...>

Thank you Mr. French for doing what was right and not what was popular!

Posted by [the3stoddards](#) on September 3, 2007 at 9:10 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

good job everyone, can't drink the water, but we saved the lill turtles. Thank you mr french. Our children will thank you too someday.

Posted by [mychbelle](#) on September 3, 2007 at 9:26 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Such cute little turtles :)

Posted by [robert.schmitt](#) on September 6, 2007 at 7:41 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

yeah and they taste good too!!!! little garlic, cilantro and cucumber cooked in with them.... JUST KIDDING!!!!... its nice to see that some things are changing for the better around here.... i for one am glad that the hatchery facility on the national seashore, and all the wonderful staff and volunteers are out there protecting our wild resources.... keep up the good work!!!

Posted by rrempp on September 6, 2007 at 8:42 a.m. (Suggest removal)

arent they just adorable? And there you go folks, I knew that seaweed had to be good for something! Way to go Mr. French.

(Requires free [registration](#).)

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